

COVID-19 Vaccines & Fetal Cell Lines

Some of the COVID-19 vaccines being studied in clinical trials use cells originally isolated from fetal tissue (often referred to as fetal cells) in various stages of vaccine development and manufacturing.

Historical fetal cell lines were derived in the 1960's and 1970's from two elective abortions that were not performed for the purpose of vaccine development. Fetal cell lines were used to create vaccines for diseases such as hepatitis A, rubella, and rabies. The fetal cells lines being used to produce some of the potential COVID-19 vaccines are from two sources:

- HEK-293: A kidney cell line that was isolated from a terminated fetus in 1972
- PER.C6: A retinal cell line that was isolated from a terminated fetus in 1985

Any vaccine that relies on these historic cell lines will not require new abortions.

Are the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines developed using fetal cell lines?

The mRNA COVID-19 vaccines produced by Pfizer and Moderna **do not require the use of any fetal cell cultures in order to manufacture (produce) the vaccine.**

Early in the development of mRNA vaccine technology, fetal cells were used for "proof of concept" (to demonstrate how a cell could take up mRNA and produce the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein) or to characterize the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were found to be **ethically uncontroversial** by the pro-life policy organization [the Charlotte Lozier Institute](#). Further, Brian Kane, senior director of ethics for the Catholic Health Association of the United States, in an interview for the [America: The Jesuit Review](#) stated: "In terms of the moral principles of being concerned about the use of any pharmaceuticals that were developed from aborted fetuses, that is certainly an issue that we all want to be cognizant of and try to avoid their use. With that in mind, the **Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccines that are coming out are not even tainted with that moral problem.**"

Is the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen Pharmaceuticals) COVID-19 vaccine developed using fetal cell lines?

The non-replicating viral vector vaccine produced by Johnson & Johnson **did require the use of fetal cell cultures, specifically PER.C6, in order to produce and manufacture the vaccine.**

The [Catholic Church](#) and the [Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission](#) have both stated that **receiving a COVID-19 vaccine that required fetal cell lines for production or manufacture is morally acceptable.**

The [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) has stated: "receiving a COVID-19 vaccine ought to be understood as an act of charity toward the other members of our community. In this way, being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love of our neighbor and part of our moral responsibility for the common good...Given the urgency of this crisis, the lack of available alternative vaccines, and the fact that the connection between an abortion that occurred decades ago and receiving a vaccine produced today is remote, inoculation with the new COVID-19 vaccines in these circumstances can be morally justified"

Why are fetal cells used to make vaccines?

To develop and manufacture some vaccines, pharmaceutical companies prefer human cell lines over other cells because 1) viruses need cells to grow and the viruses tend to grow better in cells from humans than animals (because they infect humans), 2) fetal cells can be used longer than other cell types, and 3) fetal cells can be maintained at low temperatures, allowing scientists to continue using cell lines from decades ago. A comprehensive list of COVID-19 vaccines in development and any connection to abortion derived cell lines is available [here](#).

Which COVID-19 vaccines use fetal cell lines?

For more information on COVID-19 vaccines in the pipeline that do use fetal cells to manufacture the vaccine, please see this Science [Article](#).

At this time, it is unknown which, if any, of the various COVID-19 vaccine candidates currently in development will be available to the public, or if people will be able to choose between different vaccine options.

Where can I find more information?

Some religious groups and bioethics institutes that oppose the use of aborted fetal cells in the development or manufacturing of vaccines have noted that individuals may ethically receive these vaccines when there are no ethically derived alternatives.

For more information from these groups on this issue, check out the following links:

- [National Catholic Bioethics Center](#)
- [Pontifical Academy of Life Statement](#)
- [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)
- [The Vatican – Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#)
- [The North Dakota Catholic Conference](#)
- [Charlotte Lozier Institute](#)